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Catering for the traveling foodies - developing a gastrotourism strategy through multistakeholder governance in the city of Aalborg

Extended Abstract for Tomorrow's Food Travel

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Publication date:
2018

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication from Aalborg University](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Mikkelsen, B. E. (2018). *Catering for the traveling foodies - developing a gastrotourism strategy through multistakeholder governance in the city of Aalborg: Extended Abstract for Tomorrow's Food Travel*. Abstract from Tomorrow's Food Travel , Göteborg, Sweden.

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TITLE:

Catering for the traveling foodies - developing a gastrotourism strategy through multistakeholder governance in the city of Aalborg

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

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Introduction

Special interest tourism is spreading in an age of increased connectedness and mobility. Food is one of these interests that is creating a new type of gastro-tourism and a new community of foodies that want to explore in depth the nature of foodscapes as part of their travelling experience. Foodscapes include all aspects of human food activity including growing, buying, preparation, eating, experiencing, discovering and sharing of food (Mikkelsen, 2011). At the same time, there is a growing interest in the creation and marketing of these foodscapes – to create attractive and meaningful identities around the places that tourist visits. The idea is that a city or a region possess a range of cultural and natural values that can be portrayed through its gastronomic identity. As a result there is a growing interest in capturing the distinct culinary traditions that exists in regions and cities as well as creating certain identities and brands around them. But building an identity and creating a foodscape that is attractive to foodies is a complex process. Developing meaningful foodscapes obviously serves a number of other purposes than to cater for special interest tourists and travelers. Furthermore, the governance of foodscape strategy development rely on the combined efforts of a number of different stakeholders in city or region.

The interest in place-based approaches to develop local and regional food economies has resulted in numerous policy activities. At the administrative and policy level, an increasing number of cities around the world engage in networks such as the Milan food pact, the Delice gastronomy network, the UNESCO creative cities network, the Terra Madre and the Eating cities initiatives in order to promote their cities and regions (Mikkelsen, 2018). To attract and to cater for gastro tourists and travelling foodies is an important part of this kind of policy making- But so far the effect of these policy networks and the kind of policy and strategy making they have been engaged in has only been studied to a limited extent. Cities apply a broad range of different approaches in the strategic work covering various food related aspects from growing, harvesting, processing, public procurement, distribution, preparation, dining, eating and waste handling. As such, strategies targets a broad range of food related activities in the city (Moragues et al 2013).

It can be speculated that developing a gastro tourism strategy, to successfully implement it and convert into an increased tourism is not only a question of effective marketing and branding of available dining option in and around the city. Rather it can be assumed, that the

needs and demands of gastro tourists – the travelling foodie – are much more complex than just having a choice when it comes to eating out.

The gastro tourist – a travelling foodie – can be thought of as people with a special interest in a broad range of food topics. As people who want to go behind the scenes of the traditional food system. As such it can be assumed to be much more than eating at fancy restaurants. Interests could be the possibility of visiting unique types of processing and plants, options of exploring the local terroir, the ability of visiting food markets, agro type of activities such as “hunting and harvesting”, social events such as “eat with the locals”, participation in local cooking events as well as Gastro and Edu tourism events that includes hands on food activities. This paper looks further into the processes and active components of these foodscape strategies in the city of Aalborg. Conceptually the study builds on the idea of foodscapes and place making (Schneekloth & Shibley, 1995). Foodscapes are understood as real and imagined spaces of food and people in a given context. The idea of place making is related to the creation of an identity around a given place – for instance a city or a region. Urban food strategy making (UFS) has been suggested as a notion to describe the strategy formation and identity creation that cities and regions carry out to create brands around food products and services related to a place.

The aim of the paper is to examine how a gastro tourism can be developed as part of an overall urban food strategy and what role a multi stakeholder governance plays in the food strategy development.

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Methods

The paper builds on a case study in the city of Aalborg. We use the preparatory work for the Box town gastro science food hot spot in the city as the empirical foundation. The data collection for the study was organized using a snowballing approach in which food strategy components in and around the city was identified through different means and methods. The starting point was short list authored by Aalborg Municipality developed for an international research program on urban food strategies. The short list resulted in identification and description of 19 different activities and components all related to the food systems strategy that the Municipality's Department for Environment was involved in either as driving force or as participant. The activities were grouped in the following five categories: Nature & food focused activities covering, overall Food system (Novel modes of food distribution, sales and procurement, Community-based initiatives reducing food waste, New business models / social enterprises in the food sector and Out of home focus activities, Food at Schools and Strategy & Governance. The groups were subsequently used in a round of meetings and interviews with key stakeholders from the food system in and around Aalborg. The informants were representatives dealing with education and food from schools at different levels in the city ranging from pre-school level up to higher education. From these meetings and interviews field notes were taken.

Results

The findings so far identify a broad range of actions and interventions in the city related to developing a more sustainable and health food system and at the same time to create

economic growth. The findings so far suggest that developing a consistent gastro tourism strategy is not only about developing adequate out of home eating options for incoming tourists. The insights suggest that such a strategy might benefit from being a part of an overall place based food strategy. It is argued that creating and implementing a meaningful gastro tourism strategy cannot be done in a convincing manner by single stakeholders in the tourism and hospitality sector. Instead, it is suggested that a broad multi-stakeholder governance should be established with representatives from the municipality, the region, civil society organization and the private sector. Cross disciplinarity and intersectoriality should be important elements in this approach. In particular, the findings suggest that cities could benefit from engaging with voluntary and civil organisations. The study shows that the call for more resilient and sustainable food systems seems to have been driving the creation of alliances locally within the food system. The study shows that the actions taken in the case studied spans more powers of society and that research, education, civil society, market, the public and citizens and that the interest in and creation of opportunities for innovation and co-creation with citizens might be important component of urban and regional based food systems approaches. An important part were found to be the establishment of an innovation food hub as part of the Boxtown initiative in the city. Such broad approaches could also be a promising way to support sustainability and food security in cities for the benefits of citizens and as a result involving civil participation is an important element.

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